

# Gardener by Nature LLC

## Spring Update 2026



Swiftbrook Gardens, February 1

We had very little accumulation from the recent back-to-back winter storms, but it took more than a week for the hard-packed base of sleet, topped with less than an inch of fluffy snow, to melt away. I can't recall a recent winter with so many consecutive days of temperatures in the 20's.

A general rule of thumb is that ten inches of snow is equivalent to one inch of rain, so the storms provided far less moisture than was needed to alleviate our current drought. Last fall was particularly dry with fewer than three inches of rain per month in October through December. We ended 2025 with a total of 39 inches of rain, well below our 46-inch annual average.

Almost twenty years have passed since the severe drought of 2007, but I haven't forgotten the lessons I learned that year. A number of the gardens we maintained in those days were designed for ongoing irrigation. Trees, shrubs, and perennial beds were watered on a regular schedule like turf, often twice weekly.

With municipal water supplies running low, Raleigh and other towns enacted restrictions on

### Upcoming Events

- March 14  
9:00 am-noon  
Raleigh, NC  
[Reid Garden Workday](#)  
[NC Native Plant Society](#)
- March 19  
2:00-4:00 pm  
Raleigh, NC  
[Inviting Native Plants](#)  
[Workshop at Swiftbrook Gardens](#)
- March 21  
2:00-4:00 pm  
Raleigh, NC  
[Inviting Native Plants](#)  
[Workshop at Swiftbrook Gardens](#)
- April 4  
9:00 am-noon  
Raleigh, NC  
[Reid Garden Workday](#)  
[NC Native Plant Society](#)
- April 5  
2:00-5:00 pm  
Raleigh, NC  
[Reid Garden Easter Open Day](#)  
[NC Native Plant Society](#)
- April 11-12  
Raleigh, NC  
[Oakwood Garden Club Tour](#)  
[Historic Oakwood](#)
- April 30  
2:00-4:00 pm  
[Creating a Habitat Garden](#)  
[Workshop at Swiftbrook Gardens](#)
- May 2  
2:00-4:00 pm  
[Creating a Habitat Garden](#)  
[Workshop at Swiftbrook Gardens](#)
- May 9  
9:00 am-noon  
Raleigh, NC  
[Reid Garden Workday](#)  
[NC Native Plant Society](#)
- June 13  
9:00 am-noon  
Raleigh, NC  
[Reid Garden Workday](#)  
[NC Native Plant Society](#)

Visit my [website](#) or [facebook page](#) for updates.

**First  
Sign  
of  
Spring!**

*Crocus  
chrysanthus*



outdoor water use. The irrigation-dependent gardens drooped all year. Many plants died.

Meanwhile I witnessed gardens designed to withstand dry periods, including my own, faring much better during the catastrophic drought. Our plantings weren't spectacular that summer and fall, but for the most part they survived.

The inch of rain we received on Valentine's weekend gives me hope that we're moving to a more normal weather pattern and average rainfall this year. However, it seems clear to me that climate change isn't only global; it's local. We should be planning and managing our landscapes accordingly.

While the cold and ice kept me indoors more than I'd like this winter, they enabled me to take advantage of several online workshops related to creating resilient landscapes. One of my favorites was a presentation offered by Mount Cuba Center about a recent book, [Shrouded in Light: Naturalistic Planting Inspired by Wild Shrublands](#).

The book's co-authors, a gardener and an ecologist based in Denver, Colorado, make a compelling case for using shrublands as a model for home landscapes. Shrubs offer beauty for humans and sustenance for wildlife, but generally require less maintenance than herbaceous perennials.

I covered much of what I've learned about lower-maintenance landscapes in my upcoming article for [Triangle Gardener Magazine](#). Keep an eye out for the March issue. Lessening maintenance is also the focus of my new slide presentation, *Unbecoming a Gardener*.

Our perennial spring workshop, *Inviting Native Plants*, offers participants the opportunity to explore a woodland garden comprised of plants native to the Piedmont. In *Creating a Habitat Garden*, scheduled for later this spring, we'll focus on using native plants and sustainable garden practices to benefit pollinators and other wildlife. Details about the workshops, including how to register, are on my website.

I continue to offer onsite [consultations](#) for those who want individual advice and recommendations for making their landscapes more sustainable and easier to maintain. Please share this newsletter with others who might be interested.

*Happy Spring,  
Dale*

## Another sign of early Spring

*Birdsfoot violet*



## New Presentation!

***Unbecoming a Gardener – Steps for Creating a Lower-Maintenance Landscape***



Emerging Red Buckeye Leaves

Among the benefits touted for gardening with native plants is their adaptation to existing soils and climate. Unfortunately, many traditional landscape practices undermine this inherent connection leading to less resilient plantings and, ultimately, more work for the gardener.

A better model for those who want to lessen maintenance requirements is stewardship, working closely with the existing ecosystem to develop plantings that are both sustainable and easier to maintain.

Drawing on the teachings of sustainable gardening experts and using examples from my own and clients' gardens, I'll share basic strategies for developing landscapes that are less dependent on their creators in this slide presentation designed for garden clubs and other interested groups.

To schedule a presentation for your group, email: [dale@gardenerbynature.com](mailto:dale@gardenerbynature.com).